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history that Ezra had anything to do either with writing, arranging, or revising these laws, or collecting scattered statutes in a book, called *a* book, or *the* book, of the law given by Moses.

Such is the teaching of history, whether reliable or unreliable, respecting the relation of Ezra, the scribe, to the Pentateuch. He was one of many readers and interpreters of it, and nothing more. He did not write it, he did not revise it, he did not re-arrange it. Not a line of historic evidence is found sustaining any such assumption. The traditions to that effect are modern and grotesque, bizarre, miraculous, and incredible.

If we cling to the results which true historical criticism reaches, the hypothesis, so often announced as an incontrovertible fact, is as unsubstantial as the "baseless fabric of a vision," and should disappear forever from the pages of all sound criticism.

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## AN EXEGESIS OF THE TWENTY-THIRD PSALM.

BY REV. B. F. SIMPSON, A. M.,

Jacksonville, Ill.

There is perhaps no portion of Scripture so familiar to the common reader as this Psalm—and yet there is none to which he turns more frequently, nor in which he finds more that is encouraging, helpful, and fresh. With the careful student this is yet more emphatically true. To him each new examination reveals additional phases of simple yet sublime sentiment, and of chaste yet elegant expression, such as are quite inexhaustible.

In a critical examination of the piece, we naturally begin by considering its claim to a place in the canon of Scripture. In what does this claim consist? We find, in the first place that its inscription is **מִזְמֹר לְדָוִד**, which the best authorities translate a Psalm of David. As far, then, as the inscription bears any certainty of being correct, it points to a Davidic origin for the Psalm. Allowing David to be an inspired author, this points to a just claim for the canonicity of the production. With this agrees the internal structure of the writing itself; its sentiments and forms of expression being such as are known to be characteristic of the great Psalmist. To this, again, may be added the fact that the general agreement of critics has admitted the genuineness of the Psalm, in accordance with the traditionary testimony. Some would find references to this Psalm in such passages of the New Testament as John X., 14, where the "good shepherd" is speaking, or in John VIII., 35, where the Son is said to abide in the house forever. Possibly the occurrence of the same words here may be merely accidental. Otherwise, we may consider our Lord's reference to or quotation from the Psalm to be a sanction of its truth and authority.

It will thus be seen that while any direct proof of the canonicity of this Psalm may be wanting, yet the circumstantial proof in its favor is both weighty and cumulative.

The discussion of the question of canonicity has, of necessity, in part anticipated the matter of the authorship of this Psalm. This, however, is really a separate question. To establish the authorship of a piece of writing by an inspired man may be a fair proof of its canonicity, but to show that a writing holds a legitimate place in the canon decides nothing as to its authorship. The inscription, already referred to, must be attributed to very early writers, at least, if it is not from the pen of the composer himself. There is good evidence that these inscriptions are in a large measure correct. Here it must be accepted as comparative proof. The correctness of this inscription is upheld by the position of the Psalm itself.

It is found in a collection which are allowed to have been composed by the Poet King, and this favors its ascription to him. When we add to these evidences the fact that the whole tenor of the Psalm is in keeping with the experiences of David's life, and that dis severed from those experiences it loses the greater part of its significance, it would seem that we are forced to refer its composition to him who was the great sufferer as well as the sweet singer of Israel.

There are, however, some objections to this view, two of which may be worthy of consideration. *First*, it is said that the smoothly-flowing style of the composition is radically unlike the rapid and abrupt expression of David's Psalms. But all writers vary their style in harmony with the subject of their composition. Why should not David? Who had more versatility than he? That he who combined in himself the functions and offices of shepherd, hunter, warrior, general, king, musician, poet, should be able to adapt himself in the matter of forms of expression suited to different themes is just what one might have expected. Then, further, the style of any individual may change. Indeed, it must change with the changes of taste and temperament. The argument from style, therefore, is only measurably conclusive. It has no force when urged against weighty opposing evidence. It might be added here, that notwithstanding the smoothness and beauty of the style exhibited in this piece of composition, yet in unity and terseness it is not surpassed by any other piece in the Psalter.

A *second* objection is based on the use of the **בֵּית יְהוָה** [the concluding stanza of the Psalm. It is assumed that this "house of Jehovah" must mean the temple which was not built until after David's death. But the assumption is gratuitous. **בֵּית** is the generic Hebrew word for a dwelling, and may mean a hut, a house, or a castle. The more specific word for temple is **הֵיכָל**, though **בֵּית** is sometimes used in that sense. But the Hebrew always thought of God as dwelling in some particular place, and that place, whether a tent, a tabernacle, or a temple, might be called **בֵּית יְהוָה**, as Jacob called the place where he met with God **בֵּית אֵל**, although it was not in a house of any kind. It is quite possible that, in this case, the Tabernacle is meant. It had ere this been erected on Mount Zion; in it was kept the ark of the covenant; at it the regular sacrifices were offered, and towards it devout Jews looked as the place where the Divine Presence was manifested.\* With such facts before us the objections to the earlier date of the Psalm lose their force.

A more difficult question arises in regard to the time and place of the composition. This, moreover, is an important point to settle, because whatever time we

\*See 1 Chron. xvi., 37, sq.; 2 Sam. vi., 17, and 1 Kings iii., 15.

decide on as the date of writing, will modify our view of the meaning of certain portions of the Psalm. Four different theories attempt the solution of the question of time. The first of these makes it a production of the youthful poet while yet a shepherd at Bethlehem. The second places it at a time when David was fleeing from Saul. The third puts it at the time of Absalom's rebellion. The fourth makes it the product of a retrospective view of life after the writer had passed into old age. Only a cursory review of these theories can be given.

The arguments in favor of the first theory are the following: (1) the references to pastoral life; (2) the jubilant tone of the sentiment expressed; (3) the simple and youthful appearance of the style. Plausible arguments on the surface, but superficial only. Would not the memory of that pastoral life be always fresh in the mind of the Psalmist? Would it not be especially vivid in his declining years when childhood seems nearer to the man than middle life? "The thoughts of youth are long, long thoughts." As to the jubilant tone of the sentiment, it is sufficient to say that David's life throughout had its seasons of joyous experience, between which days of darkness and trouble intervened. During any one of these seasons such an hymn as this might have been composed. The style is simple, indeed, but to whom belongs simplicity and directness of style, to the old man, or to the young? Does it not rather come from him who has been chastened by life's experiences? Readers will recall many authors who in younger life used an involved and diffuse style, but who in later years learned to express their thoughts more simply and concisely. I think this may be taken as a general rule, so that the argument from simplicity is misapplied here.

No shepherd-boy had passed through the experience which the production of this Psalm required. Says Thrupp, "Youthful faith appreciates but does not contrast; the shepherd-boy in singing of God's bounty would have forgotten the perils which he had encountered."

A second view would place the time at the close of Saul's reign, when the fury of persecution had abated, and David dwelt safely in Gath and Ziklag. No special objection to this supposition can be raised, except that the tone of the production seems to accord better with other parts of the author's life than with this part. We do not seem to see in this Psalm one who has just escaped from great peril. Such an one would naturally be absorbed in memories of the immediate past, with its trials, or the immediate present with its relief. This writer is taking a broader and calmer view of life. He sees its green pastures as well as its dark valleys. He is not standing on some near elevation of moderate altitude and trying to bend his gaze around cliffs and over other peaks that he may have a glimpse of the surrounding landscape; he is standing on a distant and lofty mountain-top and viewing at a glance the whole perspective of mountain, mead, and valley over which sunshine and cloud cast alternately their light and shade. David's drill in the school of experience had not yet been sufficient to make him the author of such a work as this.

Perhaps a more probable time of composition is during the period of Absalom's rebellion. A measure of romance has been thrown around this view by making the place of the writing the city of Mahanaim, where the exiled king took refuge. From this mountain fastness he could view in all directions the wide sheep-ranges of the Jordan valley. On his way hither he had climbed through the dark valleys or gorges which cut athwart the mountains that flank the Jordan, and form paths of ascent from the valley. Here, too, was spread before the king a bountiful feast

by his host Barzillai. Thus we have gathered around this one place the scenes and circumstances which would easily suggest the two conceptions of a shepherd and an host, which compose the theme of the Psalm. This view is thus made peculiarly attractive; and there may be good grounds for adopting it.

But the fourth view seems to involve on its side the best reasons urged in favor of the others, while it contains yet other points of support in which they are lacking. All these scenes could be recalled from a period of life which had advanced beyond them. They would be sure to return frequently to the mind of the aged seer as he rested quietly and securely in his riper years and saw his whole life-struggle pass before him like a panoramic vision. He now takes a broader view of life's several experiences than he could have taken at any previous time. He sees things calmly now, and not under the pressure of affliction nor in the excitement of a recent delivery. He rises above particular events and surroundings and contemplates life as a whole, from the shepherd days of boyhood to its final consummation. He recognizes now, as he could not when nearer to them, lines of golden light in the dark providences which had met him. He sees behind the cloud Jehovah's hand that was leading him. In the severest straits he recognizes the bounty that supplies his wants, and he breathes forth as the refrain of a whole life's experience those calm yet sublime experiences: Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in fresh pastures. . . . He prepares a table before me in the presence of mine enemies. In this goodness and mercy I will forever trust; and in His presence I will dwell continually.

We come now to ask what was the *occasion* for the writing of this Psalm. It will be seen that our view of this must be modified by the view we take of the time and place of the composition. If it was written by the shepherd-boy, then it was probably an outgrowth of youthful buoyancy and hopefulness. But *this* view seems quite inadequate to account for much that is found in the Psalm. If it was written during either of his periods of exile and suffering it was probably dictated by a sense of the author's personal frailty, and of his reliance upon Jehovah as a powerful and willing helper. If the time of its composition was the Psalmist's more mature age it was a sort of retrospective reverie, including as its chief points an expression of gratefulness for divine aid bestowed in the past, and an assurance that the same assistance will be vouchsafed in the future.

In treating of the question of authorship the matter of *style* was necessarily broached. Some additional features of this may now be considered more fully. The leading characteristics of David's style have been given as the following: (1) Unity; (2) Terseness; (3) Consecution. In the Psalm before us we have a very complete exhibition of these features. The piece is in two distinct parts; but these two parts are so entirely in harmony with each other, and unite so beautifully in the presentation of the one central thought of the whole Psalm that they intensify rather than detract from the integrity of the whole. The two pictures which compose these separate portions of the Psalm are in themselves subordinate units. We have, then, in this beautiful lyric a two-fold unity which favors its assignment to the prince of Hebrew Psalmody.

With respect to the matter of terseness we can scarcely conceive of a better example of that style than the one before us. Though among the shortest of the Psalms, it is not surpassed by any in the breadth and depth of thought. Its richness of sentiment is literally inexhaustible. It is like a censor filled with all kinds of aromatic perfumes, and which exhales a new fragrance each time it is touched.

Each of the pictures which it holds up before us presents the broad perspective of a complete human life with all its internal conflicts and external influences, together with a background of divine providence which sustains and controls the whole. Each separate sentence is pregnant with a wealth of thoughts among which we long to dwell as we pass on; and almost every word seems a charmed word because of its suggestions of truth and beauty. The consecution could not well be improved. Thought follows thought in the closest, most natural sequence. We might illustrate by quoting a few of its statements and inserting between them some of our common connectives, e. g., "Jehovah is my shepherd (therefore) I shall not want, (for) he makes me to lie down in green pastures (and) he leads me," etc. Thus it will be seen that every sentence, almost every word grows naturally out of the one that precedes it; and in turn suggests its successor. This consecution, moreover, is in the order of a true development. Each succeeding sentence is an advance on the preceding and the impression of the whole is that of thought advancing to a climax.

In a general way the style may be said to be fresh, vigorous, and beautiful, and admirably adapted to the theme which it presents. It is a style which without any artistic adornment, receives a fairer adorning from the feelings which it portrays so vividly.

That we may have the matter of this discussion more clearly before us, it may be well at this point to give a translation of the Psalm, which, being strictly literal, shall be as accurate as possible.

1. "Jehovah is my shepherd, I shall (can) need nothing.
2. In meadows of fresh grass He makes me to crouch down;  
Beside waters of repose He guides me.
3. My life He restores;  
He leads me in right paths,  
For His name's sake.
4. Also when I walk in the valley of deep darkness I will not fear calamity, for Thou art with me;  
Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.
5. Thou arranst before me a table in the presence of my enemies;  
Thou anointest my head with oil;  
My cup is abundance.
6. Only goodness and kindness shall pursue me all the days of my life;  
And I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for many days."

We have thus in these brief strophes, or perhaps it would be better to say in two strophes and one concluding stanza, the most beautiful of all Hebrew lyrics. The thought is intensely practical, and the language strikingly in keeping with the sentiment which it expresses. The Great Shepherd, the bountiful Host, and the strong feeling of security which the poet felt when he conceived of himself as a sheep or a guest under such a Protector and Provider, are the three thoughts which are the key-notes of the corresponding divisions of the piece. It is an echo from the whole past life of the Psalmist concentrated in a focal point, and presented in a word.

Let us now, in the briefest possible manner, take up the examination of its separate expressions. "*Jehovah is my shepherd.*" This figure of speech is appropriate only as employed by a Jew. To the Egyptians, as to others of the ancient peoples, the shepherd's office seemed a low and menial one. But in Israel the shepherd held the highest position. In fact, all were menials except the shepherds, in that nation during a good part of its history. The patriarchs were all shepherds. Rulers had that term applied to them as leaders of the people. In the higher

sense of a guide and guardian it is frequently applied to Jehovah.\* Thus beyond all priests and scribes and rulers, who in their sphere were called shepherds, the true Israelite felt himself continually a wanderer on this earth under the care of a heavenly shepherd. The full force of the figure could be felt only by him who had occupied the position of a shepherd, and who knew what was the relation of the flock to their keeper. But the historical facts of the case throw much light on the scene for us. The land where David had watched his flock was one of beautiful green valleys separated from each other by rugged and barren hills. The flock was often in danger of being starved in one of these narrow valleys when the herbage had all been consumed, or of dying from thirst by streams which ceased to flow in the dry season. To pass to another valley they must often encounter precipitous steeps from which they were liable to fall and be crushed to death. There were mountain torrents into which they would plunge to slake their thirst, and which would bear them away over steep cataracts, or into deep pools. There were wolves in the dark ravines, and robbers in the mountain-passes. Even lions and bears this poet shepherd had encountered while guarding his father's flock; (see 1 Sam. xvii., 34). In such surroundings the shepherd's vigilance must be untiring. He must have wisdom, courage, and strength. He must guide and protect his feeble charge, and must lead gently or bear in his bosom the weak ones. Says Robertson, "these sheep are the companions of the shepherd's daily life, for whose safety he stands in jeopardy every hour, and whose value is measurable to him not by force, but by his own jeopardy." He numbers them both morning and evening, touching each one with his rod as it passes in and out of the door of the fold, (Lev. xxvii., 32; Jer. xxxiii., 13).

Perhaps there is no class of individuals who have endured such hardships or performed such feats of heroic daring as have shepherds in caring for their flocks. Our Lord had probably a good knowledge of shepherd-life in Israel, and he describes the true shepherd as one who gives his life for the sheep.

Now David, with all these facts before him, with a marked humility and confidence says, "I am the sheep and Jehovah is the Shepherd." Or still more particularly, as giving emphasis to his personal faith, he says, "Jehovah is *my* Shepherd." How natural, then, the conclusion from this as found in the immediately connected words, "*I shall not, or cannot want.*" This is a very strong form of expression. Perhaps a better rendering of אֶחָסֵר לִי would be "I shall, or can, need nothing," or, as we might say in colloquial phrase, "I shall need nothing at all." The particle לֹא expresses objective and absolute negation in contrast with אֵל which is subjective and conditional. The Sept. translates here by the strong negative οὐδέν, the Vulgate has *nil*, and Luther uses *nichts*. Similar expressions may be found in Deut. ii., 7, viii., 9; and Ps. xxxiv., 10. How strong is the writer's confidence. The sheep lack nothing which the shepherd has power to provide. David's shepherd has an ample store of provision and abundant strength to provide.

"*In meadows of fresh grass He causes me to crouch, beside waters of repose He guides me.*" This is an enlargement of the preceding stanza. It describes the patient watch-care of the shepherd. He provides for every need. But food and drink and

\*See Gen. xlviii., 15, where the words "the God who fed me" mean the God who fed me as a shepherd; also Gen. xlix., 24; Ps. lxxxiii., 52, lxxx., 1; Is. xl., 11; Jer. xxxi., 10; Ezek. xxxiv., 11 sq.; Mic. vii., 14.

rest are supplied at once. The phrase נְאוֹת דֶּשֶׁא means, literally, meadows of fresh sprouts. It is grass which has just sprung up, hence it is sweet to the taste and pleasant to recline upon. The word נְאוֹת has a derived meaning here. Originally it meant a dwelling. Or, perhaps, still more primarily, taking its derivation from נָאָה (to rest) it meant any place where one could tarry and rest. Thus its most common signification came to be a tent in the wilderness, where the traveller sought rest and shelter. The writer probably recalled the view of some beautiful oasis, of which he must have known many in the Judean desert. How refreshing such a spot must seem in the midst of a parched waste. On it is often found a large rock whose shadow gives protection from the scorching rays of the sun. At the base of this rock is found a small fountain of pure, cool water which oozes out of the soil, and is lost again in the sand at a short distance from its source. As far as the earth was moistened by this supply of water the grass would remain fresh and green the entire season. This, then, was indeed a dwelling place in the desert, and well deserved the name נְאוֹת. Possibly the word רִבֵּץ which means to stoop or crouch down may refer to the posture which the animal assumes when grazing or drinking. (If so we would seem to have the composite idea of refreshment as ministered both by food and rest presented here as by a *constructio pregnans*). The waters of repose, or restfulness, may not be "still" waters as given in the common version. Calvin renders מִי מְנַחוֹת "gently flowing waters." So De Wette, Hitzig and others. Such waters would be thought of as in contrast with the swift mountain streams, as full of danger for the sheep. But the character of the waters is not here explained, except that they ministered refreshment to the flock. They may be wells, or fountains, or cisterns, or troughs. From all of these the flocks drank refreshing waters, and it was a chief care of the shepherd that some of these means of watering should be had where he had his flock. As the Psalmist applied this to himself, the thought was that Jehovah, his shepherd, made ample provision for his wants, and then guided him to the place where the provision was found.

"*My life he restores.*" Rendering this as in the authorized version, "*He restoreth my soul,*" it would seem necessary to refer it directly to the writer, losing all view of the sheep which is being portrayed in relation to its shepherd. This will depend, however, on the meaning which we give to נֶפֶשׁ. This word seems to have had a significance, equivalent to that of *ψυχή* or *anima*. It designates the vital principle or the animal life. It is used thus in Gen. i., 20, xii., 13, xxxv., 18; Judg. xvi., 30; Is. liii., 12. It also signifies the seat of hunger and thirst, Prov. xxv., 25; Num. xxi., 5, and Deut. xii., 20. In some such sense it could be consistently used with reference to the famished life of the sheep.

Secondarily, the reference would be to David himself. As the faint life of the sheep is restored by the new grass and fresh waters, so God's mercies which are new every morning and fresh every evening continually restore the inward life of the servant of Jehovah.

"*He leads me in right paths for His name's sake.*" Interpreting this primarily of the sheep we must not translate מַעַלְלֵי צֶדֶק "paths of righteousness." We may, however, render it paths of rightness, or straightness, which is more literally correct. The conception is that of a smooth or even path by which the flock may travel over the heights or through the passes which lay between different places



of pasturage. Most paths were uneven or crooked, and so filled with danger. There is no difficulty, however, in the way of finding a secondary application to the case of the writer. It is as true in the sphere of morals as it is in mathematics that a straight line measures the shortest distance between two points. The straight path was for David the best path to the goal of his moral life. In this path Jehovah led him "for His name's sake." That is God's highest impulse to action,—for the honor of His "name,"—for the glory of His character, and that it shall be "to the praise of His glory."

"*Also when I walk in the valley of deep darkness I will fear not calamity.*" I would, by no means, be dogmatic with respect to the rendering of this verse. The above, however, seems to answer the demands of the case best. When one meadow is exhausted the sheep must be led onward to some new pasturage. But their path thither will be over rugged mountains and through dark and dangerous valleys. Into these ravines the sheep entered with much timidity. It is said that they had to be urged to enter them. They were infested with robbers and wild beasts, and it required the utmost vigilance on the part of the shepherd to protect his flock at such times. The rod and staff, which are probably two names for the one thing, designating it as the instrument which guides and protects, must ever be extended over the feeble creatures lest they plunge into a pitfall or be carried away by an enemy. With these facts before us, the figure takes on a new beauty. It is a living picture of frail man beset with calamities yet upheld in them and guided safely through them by the hand of an Infinite shepherd. In every human life there are the "valleys of deep darkness" and despair, as well as the "delectable mountains" of pleasure and hope.

It narrows the thought too much to refer this to a view of death. There are gloomy valleys in life more intolerable than death itself. They are times when the past seems a failure, the present a burden, and the future a hopeless conflict, so that many a one chooses death as a release and says "it is less bitter than life." The pathway of David's life had been through some dark places no less gloomy than the wadys in the Palestinian hills. There had been enemies couched in the caves of the rocks on all sides of him; yet, even in such surroundings, as the sheep relied on the shepherd, so would he rely on the care and loving-kindness of his leader.

Now the picture of the shepherd and the sheep is withdrawn, and its counterpart is presented in a portrayal of the host and guest.

"*Thou arrange a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*" Perhaps an allusion to David's being entertained by Barzillai at Mahanaim when he was fleeing from Absalom. Such language, at least, very naturally recalls that incident. Some, indeed, make this an argument in favor of placing the time of writing of the Psalm at that period. But the proof seems insufficient. David had oftentimes found protection from enemies, and may have recalled various incidents which suggested this thought.

In that country the host became responsible for the safety of his guests. The Psalmist transfers this relation to Jehovah and those under his special care. When the host is a strong man his guests feel safe. So those who sit at Jehovah's table sit securely though enemies give vent to their futile rage on all sides.

But the host has another office.

"*Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup is abundance*" Literally we may render "thou makest fat my head with oil,"—a strong expression denoting the profu-

sion of the material. We find from the New Testament that this custom was perpetuated until later times. Our Lord once complained of the negligence of His host in not so ministering to him (Luke VII., 46). כּוֹסִי stands by metonymy for what the cup contains. Perhaps it includes the whole feast—(see similar expression in Ps. XVI., 5). This cup, he says, is abundance, or fullness. It continually satisfies, and yet so much is left over that he can have no apprehension of ever being in want. God's promise admits of no measure, and leaves no room for need. How naturally, then, the concluding stanza grows out of this last reflection.

"Only goodness and kindness shall pursue me all the days of my life; and I shall dwell in the house of Jehovah for many days." אֶל, originally affirmative has here a restrictive sense. Enemies have been the writer's pursuers heretofore; henceforth he will be pursued by goodness and kindness alone. I prefer the word "kindness" to the more general term "mercy," as mercy is used more in an abstract sense. David is here under the care of a personal friend, and "kindness" better expresses the personal favor. Note the use of the word יָמֵי (days of) my life, instead of saying merely all my life. There may be some connection between this and the same words used at the close of the Psalm. The thought of the stanza may be, I shall have these favors all the days of my life, and those days shall be many. The derivation of the word יִשְׁכְּנִי is uncertain. As far as its form is concerned it may come from either יָשַׁב (to dwell) or שׁוּב (to return). The best authority seems to favor taking it from the latter of these. But if so, we should expect it to be followed by אֶל instead of בְּ. We cannot render "I will return in the house of Jehovah." Delitzsch seeks to avoid this by calling it a "pregnant construction"—that is, a construction in which more is implied than what is expressed. So we might render "I will return and dwell in the house," etc. The *constructio pregnans* is not unfrequently expressed in the poetical writings of the Hebrews, and it is quite possible that this explanation is the correct one.

My translation of the last clause of the Psalm may not meet with general acceptance. Perowne translates "for length of days." So many others. The objection to this is that it is not very accurate English. I have already suggested one meaning that the passage may bear as the counterpart of another clause in the same stanza, For my own part, however, I should prefer a more indefinite expression than that. Perhaps the familiar expression, "for many long days," would convey the thought about as well as any. It may refer to the future as well as the present. Indeed, it seems best not to consider it as distinguishing between present and future as we do, but merely as expressing a certainty that for a great, indefinite length of time the Psalmist should remain a guest in the house of his great Host.

Here, then, we have in so small a compass one of the completest, most finished poems that has ever been written. Perhaps we need not qualify it by calling it *one* of the completest. Where has it any parallel? Probably no passage in literature is so often read. None else has contributed so much of cheer and comfort to men. Nowhere in so small a compass do we find so much for thought and feeling to feed upon. And yet its treasures are not exhausted. Surely it is no production of inexperienced boyhood; neither was it written in haste by one fleeing from an enemy. It is the product of matured experience, and it gives evidence both in its matter and structure of being laboriously wrought out by a master hand. The closest analysis can discern no flaw in its poetical structure; in the

beauty and sublimity of the thought; or in the perfect adaptation of the language to its thoughts and contents. Its spiritual lesson is ever fresh and has a continual application to the condition of men in this world. Man is a frail creature, with enemies and dangers on every hand. But no less an one than the Omnipotent Jehovah has become his guide, supporter and protector, and under His care he need fear no harm, but expect only goodness and kindness and a safe habitation continually.

Doctrinally it indicates the benevolent care of Jehovah, and encourages complete resignation to His will and entire trust in His wisdom and love.

While constructed on the analogies of pastoral life in Judea, it was destined to be as universal as the needs of humanity, and will be read and sung while there is a human mind to recognize a Supreme Guardian or a human heart to feel its need of His care.

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## ON THE STUDY OF ASSYRIAN.

BY PROF. D. G. LYON, PH. D.,

Hollis Professor of Divinity, Harvard University.

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DEAR DR. HARPER :

In fulfilling a promise to write you something on the study of the Assyrian language, I choose the informal style of a letter.

The value of Assyrian study is recognized by all. The full extent of that value cannot be computed until the thousands of inscriptions that still remain buried beneath the debris of ruined Assyrian and Babylonian temples and palaces have been recovered to science, and until both these and those already in the European museums are all deciphered and published. This task will require centuries.

But the work already done in deciphering and publishing the Assyrian and Babylonian writings is sufficient to illustrate the nature and value of this work. For persons interested in Old Testament study there is no other external source so fruitful in illustration and exploration of the biblical text. The Assyrian story of the deluge, so strikingly similar to one of the two interwoven narratives of Genesis, and undoubtedly antedating the time of Israel's national life, furnishes most welcome material for comparison. By the side of the biblical account of Sennacherib's invasion we can now place the Assyrian account; we have indeed the very tablets on which the royal scribes recorded this campaign. The very exact sense for chronology, which was an Assyrian characteristic, has left us a long series of years, so arranged and with such historical notices that it may act as a measuring rod for contemporaneous Hebrew history. References in the Old Testament to Assyrian and Babylonian kings, religion and customs receive full explanation. The prophetic message, always taking its coloring from the time when it was uttered, becomes more intelligible than before. Many words, whose meaning was but half understood, become clear as noonday.

For persons interested in the study of comparative religion and in the early history of the human race, what priceless treasures are contained in the Assyrian and Babylonian literature! The full pantheon, with its deities of higher and lower degree, the doctrine of good and evil spirits, the systems of astrology and magic, afford material for more than a lifetime of study. The discovery that the Assyrian